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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine document origination methods used by business professionals, relationships of factors that influence selection of document origination methods, and implications for business curricula. A 3-part questionnaire was used to obtain data from 265 Masters in Business Administration (MBA) graduates (1967-1991) from a major midwestern university. There were 120 male and 40 female respondents (60 percent of the total sample). Using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), a cross-tabulation analysis was performed for selected demographic questions on the questionnaire. Results indicate that business professionals create memos more frequently than other documents, and they use word processing software on microcomputers, minicomputers, or mainframe computers as their primary document origination method. Learning on their own is the preparation that business professionals indicate best prepared them for document origination. Business professionals feel that their desire to maintain control of their own documents and electronic mail capabilities will likely influence their choice of document origination in the future. Business instructors can prepare students for document origination by teaching them to compose writing assignments at the keyboard. The business curriculum may need to be restructured to include preparation in all phases of the document creation process for all business students. (SLD)

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DOCUMENT ORIGINATION PROCESSES OF BUSINESS PROFESSIONALS: IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine document origination methods used by business professionals, relationships of factors that influence selection of document origination methods, and implications for business curricula. A questionnaire was used to gather data from the sample of 265 MBA graduates (1967-1991) from a major midwestern university. Respondents totaled 160 (60%). Using SPSS, cross-tabulations analysis was performed for selected demographic questions in the questionnaire. Findings indicated that business professionals create memos more frequently than other documents, and they use word processing software on micro-, mini-, or mainframe computers as their primary document origination method. Learning on their own is the preparation business professionals indicated best prepared them for document origination. Business professionals feel their desire to maintain control of their own documents and electronic mail capabilities will likely influence their choice of document origination in the future. Educational implications include: Business instructors can prepare students for document origination by teaching all business students to compose writing assignments at the keyboard. The business curriculum may need to be restructured to include preparation in all phases of the document creation process for all business students.

Introduction

In this information society, management and handling of information has created a complex business communication network. Managers need access to timely and accurate information to be efficient decision makers (Mitchell, Crawford, & Madden, 1985). Information is power, and individuals and organizations who possess more of the right kind of information are in better positions to succeed.

The impact of technology on the handling of information presents new challenges to educators who prepare students for the business world. The proliferation of computers, electronic mail, electronic bulletin boards, sophisticated software programs, voice input technology, and digital telecommunication networks exemplify computer-based technology in business communication. These technologies are revolutionizing the total business communication concept and ways business is conducted.

The ability to communicate effectively ranks very high among attributes employers seek in all potential employees (Huseman, Lahiff, & Penrose, 1991). Brostrom (1988) stated that communication is business, and business is communication. In order for companies to be competitive in today's information society, employees need basic communication skills. Employees with good communication skills are valued assets (Maxam, 1988).

Sculley (1987) described the current curriculum as one that began at the turn of the century. Today's students, he stated, need the tools that they are going to use to be able to cope with the world in which they will live. The total concept of business communication has changed, and business curricula need to reflect this change.

> A few years ago we were like Humpty-Dumpty, sitting complacently atop our citadel of main-frames and secured glass rooms. Then came the PC and the microcomputer revolution. The next decade will demand that like Humpty-Dumpty, we be put back together, but in a new and dynamic way. (Ashmore, 1988, p. 19).

Objectives

The purpose of this study was to obtain information that contributes to a better understanding of current communication processes used by business professionals. The problem was to determine: (a) documentation origination methods used by business professionals, (b) relationships of factors that influence selection of document origination methods, and (c) implications for business curricula.

Related Research

Document origination processes have changed greatly during the past decade. New technologies, integration of technologies, more information workers, changing roles of secretaries, and a renewed emphasis on increased productivity in the service industry are factors justifying study of document origination processes.

Harder (1984) found that longhand was the method of document origination most often used in offices of major American corporation. Guffy (1988) reported that of all typewriting tasks given to typists, 49% were in longhand. Kirby and Oliver (1988) stated that the primary source of document input for all respondents was longhand. Andera (1991a) examined usage of electronic dictation and concluded that dictation skill development is important to business professionals. In another study, Andera (1991b) examined techniques most often used as well as preferred to create business documents--handwriting was listed first.

In a study to determine computer keyboarding skills needed by business professionals, Wentling (1990) found a majority of business professionals in all fields utilize the computer during a typical work day. Respondents think keyboarding skills substantially increase productivity when they use a computer. Pollard (1991) studied 50 students enrolled in business communication classes who were asked about composing at the computer versus using the computer to key in documents. Only five students used a word processing package as the primary writing tool in composing their written assignments. Interviews with students revealed that they had not tried to compose on the computer without a written instrument in front of them.

Microcomputers linked to large computers allow professionals to easily transfer data from the point-of-entry microcomputer to other machines (Scriven, Kozoll, Myers, & Hopke, 1992). Digital dictation systems offer enhanced reliability and speed, higher capacity, random information access, and multifunctional applications (Voice of the Future, 1990). Voice input technology allows users to speak into microphones and see text appear on video screens (Bartholome, 1991). Integrated voice/data terminals are expected to replace telephones, personal computers, modems, electronic mail software, and memo pads
(Siragusa, 1986).

Traditional secretarial roles are changing. Clerical tasks are often performed by managers using word processors (Winkler, 1985). Growing demand for information workers requires that more students be prepared to effectively originate business documents. Knowledge of relationships between factors and document origination methods is essential to designing business curricula. Business instructors need answers to questions relevant to curricula planning so structural changes in the business environment can be integrated into business curricula (Daggett & Jaffarian, 1990). The scope of the business curriculum may need to be broadened to provide all business students with skills once thought to be essential only to secretarial majors. As various factors affect complex business information systems, business instructors should seek answers to questions relevant to curriculum planning.

Research Procedures

The population consisted of 653 Master of Business Administration graduates (1967-1991) from a major midwestern university. A random sample of this population was believed to be representative of business professionals who create business documents. According to Wunsch (1986), the sample size needed using alpha = .05 for a population of 500 is 218 subjects. Because of anticipated low response rate, every other usable name appearing on the alumni

printout was selected for a total of 265 subjects. For this sample size, a 60% response rate would be needed for an error limit of 5%.

A three-part questionnaire, including questions concerning document origination methods, factors that contribute to origination methods, and demographic data about respondents, was developed to collect data that would provide answers to research questions. Content validity was addressed through review by a 4-member panel of business communication instructors. A pilot study was conducted using 20 names from the master list who were not selected as part of the sample. According to suggestions from the pilot group, changes to the questionnaire were made. Questionnaire, cover letters, and stamped return envelopes were mailed, and a follow-up mailing was conducted approximately 3 weeks later. A total of 160 usable questionnaires were returned for a 60% response rate. Data from the first mailing were compared to those from second mailing; there were no visible differences in responses from the first and second mailing groups.

Data from questionnaires were coded and entered on computer scan sheets. Using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), frequencies and percentages were generated. Cross-tabulation analysis was performed by the SPSS subprogram CROSSTABs to compute Chi-square analysis to compare relationships between document origination methods and demographic variables. Cramer's coefficients were calculated to determine strengths of relationships.

Results/Conclusions

The 120 male and 40 female business professionals who responded were primarily in the 31 - 40 age group. While respondents were from a variety of undergraduate programs, marketing and accounting represented the largest groups. The highest degree for a majority of respondents was the MBA. The largest number of business professionals were in middle management or professional staff positions, and manager or analyst were titles most often reported. Service was the most frequently reported category for type of company in which respondents were employed. The category of 0 - 5 years was most frequently reported by respondents for number of years with their company and number of years in current position.

These business professionals created memos more frequently than they created other documents. Letters are created less frequently than memos but more frequently than reports. Forms are created less frequently than all other business documents. Business professionals indicated they use the "keyboard to input their own documents" more frequently than any other method of document origination with "handwriting for someone else to complete" ranking second in frequency. "Dictation to a secretary" is used less frequently than any other method of document origination.

Most business professionals have microcomputers with word processing software or word processors through mini- or mainframe computers available for creating their business documents. A majority indicated they share a secretary with coworkers while considerably fewer professionals reported they have a full-time secretary.

Learning on their own is the method most respondents perceived as providing the best training in document preparation. An almost equal number of respondents perceived one business communication course in college and in-house company training as providing their best preparation for document origination.

Business professionals anticipated that in the next 2 to 3 years they will communicate more through electronic mail, have less administrative support, choose to prepare their own documents or be expected to prepare their own documents on micro-, mini-, or mainframe computers. Business professionals anticipated having voice recognition input technology in the next 4 to 10 years.

Respondents generally disagreed with the statement that they originate business documents in handwriting because they are more comfortable handwriting than originating documents by dictating or keyboarding. Respondents agreed that administrative support personnel are available to keyboard documents from longhand notes.

Business professionals disagreed with the statement that they use dictation equipment to originate business documents. A majority of respondents disagreed with the statement that their company will continue to have support personnel available to take shorthand notes for document origination.

A majority of business professionals agreed that they have a micro-, mini-, or mainframe terminal with word processing software at their workstation for document origination. Respondents reported that learning to use word processing software on their own influenced their choice of document origination methods. A majority of business professionals agreed that business communication classes should include instruction in originating business documents using word processing software on computers.

Business professionals agreed that their desire to maintain control of their own documents influenced their choice of document origination methods. Additionally, respondents agreed that electronic mail capabilities will likely influence their choice of document origination in the future. A majority of business professionals disagreed with the statement that the philosophy of their company is that business professionals should not spend their time keyboarding business documents. A majority of respondents agreed that productivity in producing business documents is an issue in their company.

Findings of this study showed a relationship at the .05 alpha level between document origination methods and respondents' age for letters, reports, and memos under the headings "keyboard yourself and send." Males tended to use "rough draft keyed for someone to complete" for forms and "keyboard yourself and send' for letters more than females. No relationships existed that the .05 alpha level for document origination methods and undergraduate majors. Both senior managers and middle management respondents tended to handwrite for some else to complete while professional staff and first-line supervisors more often keyboard and send their own letters, reports, and memos. Respondents in manufacturing companies tended to handwrite letters for someone else to complete more than other respondents. Respondents employed with

companies for 6-10 years handwrite reports for someone else to complete more than other respondents.

Educational Importance

This study was conducted to provide information which could have a direct and explicit bearing on business curricula. The business professionals in this study perceived that they have learned to originate business documents primarily on their own. Only 29 respondents listed their college communication courses as their best preparation for originating business documents. If business communication classes can provide learning activities relevant to actual business practices, perhaps future graduate will perceive communication courses as "best" preparation for document origination activities they perform in business.

It is obvious they need preparation in all phases of the document creation process. They may be more than can be included in one business communication courses. Electronic communication activities may need more than standard business communication classes can provide. In addition to mastering techniques for composition at keyboards, business students need knowledge of formats and layouts for documents and need to be proficient in fundamentals of grammar and word usage. Also, all business students need skills in files management, knowledge of distribution processes, and experience in using electronic mail.

Findings from this study imply that business curricula may need to be restructured if business instructors are to meet the challenge of change and adequately prepare all business students for business communication activities in the increasingly technological environments in which they will work.

Recommendations

1. Business communication instructors should teach students to originate business documents using word processing software on computer terminals.

2. Students should have keyboarding skills and should be familiar with word processing software before they enter business communication classes. Class time should be devoted to developing critical writing skills and not computer skills.

3. Students should be taught effective techniques for originating documents at keyboards. Allowing students to keyboard assignments after they have handwritten them only encourages students to repeat the input process, a costly and ineffective procedure.

3. Business students should be taught effective methods and procedures for all phases of the document origination cycle including input, processing, storage and retrieval, output, and distribution and communication. As administrative support decreases and business professionals become responsible for communication tasks, knowledge of the total communication process is needed.

4. All business students regardless of major should be taught to produce effective electronic messages.

5. Research is needed on a continuing basis to provide business instructors with knowledge of current and expected trends in business communication in the business world. Technologies will continue to spur changes in ways business communication is conducted. On-going research is needed to understand how new technologies may alter ways business communication is conducted.

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